

https://ernestmandel.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=297

Sectarianism and the Democratic Demands - Parliamentarism in Western Europe Today

- Works -

Date de mise en ligne : mercredi 9 octobre 2024

Date de parution : 1er mai 1946

Copyright © Ernest Mandel - Tous droits réservés

From *New International*, Vol.12 No.5, May 1946, pp.150-51,

but see in reply to this E. Germain, "An Open Letter to the Editor of *New International*", *Fourth International*, Vol.7 No.11, November 1946.

Transcribed by Ted Crawford.

Marked up by Einde O'Callaghan for the *Marxists' Internet Archive*.

The following article by E. Germain, secretary of the Belgian section of the Fourth International, is reprinted from *L'Avant Garde*, theoretical organ of the Belgian party, as a contribution to the discussion of the relationship of democratic demands to the struggle for power. We append to this article a resolution on this question adopted by the Belgian party at its congress last year. *The New International* regards both documents as an excellent contribution to the struggle against sectarianism which has had such dire effects upon the development of some of the most important parties of the Fourth International. The entire international movement has been dividing up in the last two years into two general tendencies on this crucially important question. The one tendency represents a doctrinairism which, in some respects, borders upon Bordigaism on the question of democratic demands. Its most influential representatives are to be found in the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party of the United States (Cannon faction). The other tendency represents an attempt to apply the principles of the movement to the political reality of today in the tradition of Lenin's policies during the Russian Revolution and the political line adopted by the Fourth International under the guidance of Trotsky in Germany, Spain, France and other fluid political situations in the decade of 1930-40. The latter tendency finds an able advocate in the Belgian section. The Workers Party of the United States is not only identified with this latter tendency, but is proud of its record in discharging its international responsibilities by taking a lead in working out a realistic strategy for revolutionary Marxists at a time when the European comrades were handicapped by the isolation and illegality imposed by the Nazi occupation. The point of view expressed in the following documents is entirely consistent with the position established by the WP in its resolution on the national question in Europe (*The New International*, February, 1943). – Editors.

It is the lag of consciousness behind reality which is found at the root of the crisis of humanity. The world is more than ready for socialism, but the great majority of humanity has neither understood the necessity for the proletarian revolution, nor discovered the only road to bring it about. The Fourth International has posed as its task the solution of this contradiction by showing the masses through their own experience that no other means exist for hurdling this impasse than the taking of power by the proletariat. That is the essential function of its Transitional Program ; its slogans become understandable to the masses at a stage determined by their evolution, which permits mobilizing them in action, its unrealizable character within the traditional limits of capitalism at the same time allows involving the masses beyond these limits, and of making them place their first stakes on the revolutionary road.

The Bordighists, who are in general honest people but wretched revolutionaries, do not understand the, fundamental problems of our epoch. Identifying their own experience with that of the masses, they think it will suffice to proclaim ceaselessly "the necessity" of the socialist revolution in order eventually to lead them to its attainment. As always, shortsightedness goes together with sectarianism, and the Bordighists declare democracy and fascism "equivalents." They do not distinguish between Van Acker and Degrell, Franco and Caballero. Twice before in history, ideas of this type have tripped up the sectarians and pushed the proletarians into the worst defeats. "Refusing" in practice to make a distinction between fascism and the decadent parliamentary regime of 1921-22, the Bordighists attached no importance at all to preparations for the fascist coup d'etat, did not mobilize the masses in order to oppose "the march on Rome" – and shortly discovered the "difference" in a physical fashion. Repeating most of the sectarian errors of the Bordighists, the German CP thought similarly, in 1932, that with Von Papen fascism "had already triumphed." At the same time, they rejected in practice, like the Bordighists in theory, the Leninist theory of the united front with the Social Democracy. But Hitler did not delay while they learned that one could not play hide' n' seek with the burning tasks of the moment. Yet the Bordighists claim for themselves the doubtful honor of never learning, although history offers living proof.

In looking through No.13 of L'Internationaliste (The Fourth International and the Reconstruction of Capitalism) the Bordighists discover that the Fourth International participates in the struggle for the reconstruction of capitalism when it advances its program of transitional demands, an old sectarian argument against Leninism. The author of the article clearly states the principle that the transitional demands are realizable under capitalism since the Trotskyists do not speak of the "preliminary" seizure of power. He doesn't yet understand – and it is really necessary to ask oneself whether the Bordighists will ever understand anything about Leninist politics – precisely what it means to lead the masses toward the seizure of power ; that the masses will never break away by themselves under the slogan "Long Live the Revolution," but that they well can set themselves into motion for transitional demands which necessarily lead them beyond the limits of capitalist property and the capitalist state. It follows from this line of thinking that "Lucain" thinks of the "realization" within the "framework of capitalism" of workers' control of production, expropriation of the banks and of the workers' militia as a serious attempt at the reconstruction of capitalism ...

The Constituent Assembly

The confusion does not stop there ! Not having understood the real character of the transitional demands, he sets out to fight against the slogan of a constituent assembly which he evaluates in the same light. Now, it is a question here of an immediate demand, but the Bordighists attach only slight importance to these "distinctions." The demands in general interest them very little. They prefer to proclaim the "necessity of the socialist revolution." Nevertheless, the slogan of the Constituent Assembly was correct in Russia "at a time when the bourgeoisie was still capable of playing a revolutionary role" ! Returning to the Menshevik conception of the Russian Revolution, Lucain neatly demonstrates how much of the theory of the permanent revolution is foreign to him. He understands neither the counter-revolutionary rôle of the Russian bourgeoisie in 1917, nor the bourgeois struggle against the Constituent Assembly which was, during the three Russian revolutions, a slogan not originating with the bourgeoisie but with the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat. If he took the trouble to reread any history of the October Revolution, he would have known that the very call for the seizure of power by the Petrograd Soviet was formulated in this sense : it is necessary to counteract the counter-revolutionary intrigues which tend to obstruct the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. For Lucain today this slogan is outmoded because we are "in the period of the decline of capitalism." Citizen Lucain, were we in a period of the ascendance of capitalism in 1917 ?

The Bordighist solution of the problem of the Constituent Assembly is very simple : it is necessary to "abstain" from the elections. Cannot we justly say that the Bordighists "abstain" from all the problems that have immediate interest for the working class ? Evidently, to profit from the election for the Constituent Assembly, in order to spread propaganda for a Socialist United States of Europe through press, posters, meetings and radio ; to appeal to the French Steve, dares by radio to refuse to load ships sent against Indo-China – all this constitutes a "bourgeois function" (?), the significance of which is to prepare "The decapitation of the proletariat."

Parliamentarism re-emerges

We understand that the root of the problem is simple. Before the general crisis of the bourgeois system the large mass of laborers and petty bourgeoisie aspire to profound changes on the political and social scene. But at the same time, the Nazi occupational. regime in Europe and the long years of open dictatorship develop again strong currents among the masses in favor of parliamentarism. It is a question of proving again to the masses through their own experience the fake character of democratic parliamentarism. But it is, at the same time, a question of profiting from the profound but confused revolutionary aspirations of the masses to question again – on the electoral plane which remains temporarily the only level on which the masses understand these problems – all the fundamental bases of the bourgeois state and of capitalist property. And the bourgeois itself understood that very well, in Greece, as in Italy, as in France, where it did its utmost everywhere in a most energetic fashion to postpone to the ever distant

future the elections for the Constituent Assembly. One year ago, the French sectarians ridiculed the Trotskyists because the latter advanced the slogan for the Constituent Assembly, which according to them was understood by no one ; but a year later, the masses had forced the bourgeoisie to capitulate before their unanimous will. It is clearly understood that the question of knowing what class will profit by the elections will be decided, aside from the Constituent Assembly, by the alignment, spirit and direction of class forces involved. But let us always remind our sectarians that the elections of 1936 played an equal part in precipitating June 1936 !

Is it necessary to add that a section of the Fourth International never advances the slogan of a Constituent Assembly in an isolated fashion ? That it always ties it up with the demand for a government of the workers parties and the struggle for all the transitional demands ? That it puts the masses on guard against the illusion, from the very first, that they can realize this program on the parliamentary level ? That it moves them forward in order that class action forces the Constituent Assembly to take a position on all the burning problems ? That thanks to the inactivity and to the numerous betrayals of the leaderships of the old workers parties, their break with parliamentarism and their coming over to the revolutionary party and struggle is immensely facilitated ? For a Bolshevik Party, that is the height of the significance of the experience of the masses as regards the slogan "Constituent Assembly" and "Break with the Coalition !" For the Bordighists this experience is meaningless. They have for a long time known that "the reformists are traitors." Their own experience is amply sufficient for them. But it is a question for us of winning over the masses, and for that ranting is not enough. One is astonished that the Bordighists, who continually speak of "purity," have believed it necessary to mix infamy of the purest Stalinist style with their confusion and sterile sectarianism, For Lucain, "submissiveness" (sic) of the Fourth International "to the reconstruction of capitalism, permits them to put out propaganda over the government radio of the capitalist state." If one wanted to follow them on this path one could say that the total impotence of the Bordighists to threaten the capitalist "order," such as it is, permitted them to make their papers appear legal when La Voix de Lenine and Le Pouvoir aux Travailleurs were banned. But we prefer not to follow that path, because it leads nowhere.

E. Germain [didim escort](#), [marmaris escort](#), [didim escort bayan](#), [marmaris escort bayan](#), [didim escort bayanlar](#), [marmaris escort bayanlar](#)